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*Brass'Art à Molenbeek : laboratoire urbain du « faire-ensemble »*

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# Brass'Art in Molenbeek: an urban experiment in community relations

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## Introduction

- 1 One year after the attacks on Zaventem airport and the Maelbeek metro in Brussels, Brass'Art opened its doors on the 22 March 2017 anniversary date in the heart of Molenbeek. The opening of the café generated considerable public interest, gathering hundreds of journalists, politicians and people from the artistic and academic scene on the evening of the inauguration. It was therefore a highly anticipated event. It was seen as an integral part of a larger effort to revitalise a neighbourhood and city recently described as a “hellhole” by US President Donald Trump. Molenbeek, one of the largest, poorest and most populated municipalities in Brussels, has been a symbol of deterioration and rampant Islamism for a number of years [see Fadil, 2014]. The involvement of several Molenbeek residents in the 2015 and 2016 attacks in Brussels and Paris, and the locating of Salah Abdeslam's hiding place in the municipality (one of the participants in the 13 November 2015 attack) quickly established its international reputation as a breeding ground for jihadist terrorism [EIP, 2017], to the point that the French journalist Eric Zemmour suggested at the time that France should bomb Molenbeek instead of Raqqa. In reaction to this dystopian view, several local activists from Molenbeek and Brussels set up counter initiatives to propose a different image of the municipality. Against preconceived ideas of violence and poverty, projects such as #Jesuis1080, #IloveMolenbeek, Molen Ma Belle, Molengeek, occasional public demonstrations and sit-ins organised by residents present a picture of Molenbeek as a warm, entrepreneurial, creative and generous neighbourhood.
- 2 The initiators of Brass'Art, an artists' collective formed by a Belgian-Moroccan actor from Brussels, saw this project as an opportunity to gather and to have a space of their

own beyond social and religious divisions. A major component of the café's success and the enormous enthusiasm generated in the local press at its opening, was the initiator's decision to sell alcohol there. In most of the cafés and restaurants run by Belgian-Moroccans in the nearby commercial streets (such as Chaussée de Gand), *halal* food is served. As a result, the municipality has a reputation as a “Muslim enclave” where alcohol is hard to find. The fact that a Muslim Belgian of Moroccan origin opened a café where alcohol is served in the heart of Molenbeek quickly became a selling point for local politicians. Brass'Art was praised by the press: a convivial place where non-Muslim residents of Molenbeek could finally relax and enjoy a beer in their neighbourhood without having to go to the city centre. There were even hopes that the café would attract people from outside the municipality and allow them to discover it. However, the presence of alcohol also became a source of tension and debate among the inhabitants of the municipality, in particular those of Moroccan descent. While some people welcomed the initiative as a vehicle for diversity, others criticised the decision to serve alcohol. This was seen as a regrettable concession to the local authorities. It was also seen as an attempt to play the card of “good Muslim” [Mamdani, 2002]. And this, to the extent that in some cases people refused to enter the place, claiming that it was “tainted” due to the presence of alcohol – widely considered to be illicit (*haram*) in Islam.

- 3 This paper takes the case of the Brass'Art cultural café, located on the municipal square of Molenbeek, as a starting point for a study of the ethical tensions and aspirations which are or can be negotiated in order to build a common space with a pluralistic purpose. Based on an ethnographic study between May 2017 and January 2018, this article aims to show how the issue of alcohol mobilises and concentrates diverse and even contradictory registers – of a discursive, ethical and emotional nature – behind the creation of public space. For a period of four to five months, the authors of this article participated as volunteer barmaids and took part in activities at the café on a regular basis. This immersion is the subject of continuous field observation notes. Between September 2017 and January 2018, six in-depth interviews were also conducted with stakeholders, focus group discussions took place with volunteers, and interviews with local associations and businesses were held in order to gain an external perspective of the place. The first section presents the space and discusses its uncoordinated nature (2), following a brief presentation of the theoretical framework (1). The next section looks at alcohol as an ordinary object for sale (3). Finally, the last section focuses on the tensions due to the heterogeneous composition of Brass'Art and, in particular, how this is managed through bodies/practices in order to maintain a moral framework (4).

## 1. The “public” body

- 4 The definition of the public space is not so much inspired here by the Habermasian ideal-typical understanding, namely: the “public” understood as the result of a series of discursive exchanges between rational agents with conscious intentions and (semi-)formalised objectives (following the model of the *homo economicus*). Instead, we shall adopt a definition of “public” which is inductive and pragmatic, seen more as the product of a creative entanglement [Ingold, 2010] or as a complex series of interactions and/or assembling of humans and non-humans [Latour, 2006]. In this context, there

may be discursive, material and sensory or bodily interactions. Moreover, and in the same vein, the presumption is not made as to whether interactions are completely intentional or totally controlled. But rather, it is suggested that the “public” presents itself through a flow of random, fortuitous, unpredictable interactions. In this sense, the public space is comparable to a node of tensions resulting from a host of iterations, materialities, affects and bodily performances [Mazarella, 2009; Navaro-Yashin, 2012; Massumi, 1995].

- 5 A series of studies in the field of conviviality studies seek to understand the question of living together in urban areas qualified as places of *superdiversity* [Nowicka and Vertovec, 2014; Wessendorf, 2014]. While some of these studies focus primarily on the strategy of “civil indifference” in order to understand the management of plural registers [Wessendorf, 2014: 394], others focus more on the emotional dimension of the daily accommodations which exist in these areas [Ahmed, 2004; Navaro Yashin, 2012]. Ash Amin's perspective [2008, 2015], in particular, insists on the fact that conviviality is not a given fact, but results instead from the entanglement in space and time of human and non-human entities which are at the origin of the development, deployment and activation of the social aspect. In this framework, the acceptance of difference does not result from a conscious recognition of otherness (human or non-human), but constitutes the result of a pragmatic, emotional (and often non-explicit) rearrangement within a specific place.
- 6 The focus on alcohol in this article is based on the actor-network theory (ANT) and methodology which proposes an analytical filter whereby the material is one of the preferred observation points of the social world being created [Akrich *et al.*, 2010; Latour, 2006: 231-245]. The alcohol object is therefore approached as a particular material site through which existing relationships are redefined and/or create new points of interaction [Muniesa and Callon, 2009]. This focus on non-human agents and their agency allows us to develop an understanding of physical space by considering action before agents. A local site such as the Brass'Art café where the social aspect (the “public”) is not (yet) stabilised offers an exemplary gateway to hot sites, where what Latour refers to as the “uncertainty of action” prevails [Latour, 2006]. In this context, the pragmatic notion of attachment will be used among others to describe this site [Callon and Rabeharisoan, 1999; Latour, 2000; Hennion, 2010, 2013]. The development of this concept aims to challenge the idea of the self as an autonomous entity, with all subjectivities seen as the product of relationships. This paper therefore aims to understand how Brass'Art represents a central site where (ethical) attachments are (re)assembled and to show the mediating role played by material things – alcohol – in this process.

## 2. The will to believe: reclaiming Molenbeek

Molenbeek really lives in me  
 It is not in ruins  
 Which some people want to rush through  
 They play the wrong trump  
 They have truly  
 gone astray  
 Molenbeek my naughty one

Cherishing you is my pride and joy  
 You welcomed me  
 You shouldn't blame yourself  
 Filip Van Zandycke, 22.03.2017  
 (Poem for Brass'Art)

- 7 The founder of Brass'Art explains that he had the idea of opening a café when he saw an abandoned building on the municipal square which was going to be renovated and put on the market for sale by the municipal administration. He approached the local authorities, hoping to find a way to use the space to create an autonomous cultural centre. It was a long-term project. He reached a deal with the municipal council: in the year preceding the renovation works, he and his team would be allowed to use the place free of charge provided they opened a cultural café. With the help of the crowdfunding system (growfunding), a modest budget helped them to brighten up and furnish the space. The fate of the project was not linked to any guarantee beyond the date on which the municipality would implement its extensive renovation plan. But encouraging Brass'Art in this way meant putting pressure on the municipality and dissuading it (or trying to) from placing this large space on the private market. The initiator of the cultural café said: “The day I found out that Nicolay<sup>1</sup> had his sights on the building, I wanted to have it. The last thing we need is a new Walvis<sup>2</sup> in the neighbourhood. It is important that we should make use of this space and not let developers take it over.”
- 8 In a short time, Brass'Art succeeded in positioning itself in Brussels as a rhizomatous,<sup>3</sup> well-known and appreciated structure which integrated the artistic and cultural scene. Politicians, social workers, artists and local residents found a way to use the space in many different ways: for work, as a quick coffee break, for an artistic<sup>4</sup> workshop or, simply, to use the toilets. While the values of openness – social mix, diversity, conviviality – are ideological labels for the place, actions prevail over ideas. The place does not have any ideological or political ambitions strictly speaking: what is done (and undone) there is more important than the identity of the place. It is through the investment of the organisers and volunteers that the place has survived. Uncertainty about the sustainability and durability of the project<sup>5</sup> also reinforces this aspect, amplifying the methods of investing in the here and now, even if, at the same time, the operational methods “in the making” generate stress and repeated adjustments in terms of organisation. Brass'Art operates as a place which is far from being disturbed by its open and undetermined character – to paraphrase Abdoulmaliq Simone [2003] – and instead is driven by it thanks to the unfailing commitment of numerous stakeholders [see also Van Den Broeck, 2016].

### 3. Alcohol ethic

- 9 “Making coffee is a very delicate operation,” points out the manager on our first day as volunteer barmaids. The large espresso machine with its milk frother is one of the place's treasures which the volunteer coordinator is proud of, having discovered it in a second-hand shop. The manager gives us a quick lesson: which grains to use and how to grind them, and which pressure to use for the perfect froth for a latte or a cappuccino. Mastering these techniques proved to be of the utmost importance when the time came to prepare *NosNos*. This coffee is a mix of half coffee and half milk (*nos* meaning “half”

in Arabic) and is very popular in Morocco. A special bag of darker beans is used to make this ground coffee in a separate machine. The coffee is also served in a transparent glass with a handle, a saucer and a spoon. Drinking this type of coffee outside the Brussels cafés dominated by the male population is quite unusual, and Brass'Art thus hoped to attract the attention of Moroccan passers-by. And indeed, on repeated occasions, especially during festivities in the municipal square or on market days, young and old Moroccans, both men and women alike, have come to the café for a *NosNos* on the terrace or inside.

- 10 Serving beer is a simpler operation. Among the beers on offer at Brass'Art are classics such as *Westmalle Trappist*, as well as a multitude of beers from the city's microbreweries. *Brasserie de la Senne*, *Brussels Beer Project* and *Brasserie du Renard* are now popular brands which have become distinct “labels of Brussels”, sold in trendy bars in Brussels to a young generation of urban professionals (often called “bohós”). While the initiator of the cultural café project does his best to talk about the taste of all of the types of beer served, his knowledge of it as a non-drinker is limited. He says that he usually hands the bottles to the customers with the appropriate glass and they pour the beer themselves. The volunteer coordinator, on the other hand, likes to take her time to describe the wide range of flavours to customers. And she feels that it is important to serve the beer: she always makes sure that there is some nice light foam at the top of the glass before handing it to the customer.
- 11 The presence of alcohol and *NosNos* coffee are not insignificant: they actually play an important role in defining the identity of the café. These products function as a symbolic indexing and as vehicles for recognition among those whose needs Brass'Art seeks to meet. But the symbolic weight of these two products is not equivalent. Beer attracts a lot of attention from the outside world and, indeed, is one of the reasons for the praise or – on the contrary – the criticism received by the cultural café.

“So, you feel comfortable with this whole alcohol issue?” I asked the coordinator after I had finished washing the dishes, standing behind the counter during a quiet moment. This was not the first time we had discussed the issue. During the first discussion, I had already expressed my astonishment at his decision to sell alcohol. At the time, he confirmed that he had really given it a lot of thought. This was before the controversies had emerged. “No, I feel okay with it. I feel at peace and it's not something which bothers me. I've spoken about it with several people. (...) But then I talked it over, in particular with Hamid (a well-known and highly respected Muslim intellectual). I was happy to see him in the café as soon as it opened. He was also one of the first to speak at a conference at Brass'Art. This was his way of providing moral support to the initiative. In addition, I remember a conversation with Aziz which was very helpful to me because he asked me a decisive question. He said to me, ‘The most important thing is how you feel. Do you feel morally tormented? Conflicted?’ I gave it a lot of thought. I didn't feel that way. There is not a single bit of a negative feeling about it, nothing that would make me feel bad. This has helped. (...) You know, in Islam, the stance with respect to alcohol is not as clear-cut as we think. There are debates. But I don't wish to venture into these theological discussions. I'm not here to say that alcohol is halal. That's not what I'm interested in. But rather, I'm at peace in terms of my personal ethic.”  
Observation notes, NF, 14 July 2017

- 12 In the above passage, several motivations behind the decision can be identified: on the one hand, there is a significant emotional dimension which refers to the register of “feelings” (with regard to alcohol). The fact that he feels comfortable with the issue of selling alcoholic beverages and that he has no inner conflict, makes him comfortable

with this choice.<sup>6</sup> However, the reference to the sentimental does not lead him to describe an emotional state – which would be distinct from rational deliberation [Lutz, 1986]; it is more a question of the various ways in which practical judgement<sup>7</sup> is used as a lever for action and decision. Morality and ethics deepen with layers of daily deliberative practices. It is a delicate search for balance in which moral affect is used – a set of semi-conscious and unconscious attitudes and/or states which have been described in the literature as an “ordinary ethic” [Lambek, 2010; Jouili, 2015].

- 13 Nevertheless, this deliberative practice is linked to a tacit attachment to the Muslim tradition. In addition to his personal feelings, the project coordinator is exploring the arguments with respect to the illicit nature (“*haram*”) of alcohol, through the conferences and activities related to Islam held at Brass'Art. Indeed, indirectly, these meetings provide support and moral legitimacy to the cultural café (see also below). The question at stake is how to be at one and at ease with your own social determinants (family and religious socialisation). Our hypothesis is that there is a regulation which comes into play here between freedom and determinism, whereby we tame ourselves in a way, and build the right relationship with our own attachments (for example, being attached to the prohibition of alcohol). The right subjective arrangement will be the one which makes us feel good. The achievement of this degree of agency can be described as the “middle voice” in Latourian terms [Latour, 2000: 21]: a voice which is neither passive nor active, but which links both.
- 14 However, there is no question of restricting this decision to an ethic based on Islam. In many circumstances, concern about the (il)licit nature of alcohol is expressly suspended in favour of a more utilitarian and instrumental approach to this object, i.e. the fact that the sale of alcoholic beverages is capable of covering all costs or even of generating a profit. Or, the argument will advance the historical relativity of the relationship to alcohol within the Muslim community.<sup>8</sup> This type of argument de-ethicises alcohol, which consequently becomes an ordinary object without a price in moral terms. It is important to say that this movement is neither neutral nor passive. Making alcohol “ordinary” involves an active operation on ethical and emotional arrangements which has a twofold result: not challenging or discrediting the Muslim ethos and taking a fresh look at alcohol (by re-historicising it). A final argument places the resistance with respect to alcohol within a broader misunderstanding of what a “café” represents to Moroccans and Muslims. Moroccan migrants associate cafés historically with derogatory experiences of violence, discrimination and debauchery. Through this prism, alcohol as an object becomes an object in a network of objects which defines a historical sequence for a group of migrants, vesting it with a particular connotation.

“It's the same thing once again,” says the initiator of Brass'Art, referring to a conversation from the previous evening with a renowned Brussels anti-racist left-wing activist. This person asked him if he was afraid that the café would contribute to the gentrification of the neighbourhood: “Won't you attract mainly boho customers from the other side of the canal? Won't alcohol actually chase Muslims away?” The café coordinator then enters a monologue, bothered and even annoyed. “But what the guy doesn't understand is that they're not ‘Muslims’: they're people from the neighbourhood who, like me, grew up in Molenbeek with a strong bias regarding cafés, bistros and brasseries. Why? Because cafés have the reputation of being places where violence prevails, where there are fights, where lonely men sit and drink from 9 am, where we, as Moroccans, have not always been welcome. People here probably thought that they would find that type of place. But it takes

time to do things differently. For there to be children. And a different atmosphere. We need to reclaim things step by step.” He concludes, “In reality, it has more to do with a bias regarding cafés than with alcohol.” Observation notes, MK, 11 August 2017

- 15 Through these different motivations, we observe an active (re-)defining of cafés (in terms of the sale of alcohol) aimed at ensuring the respectability of these places. The next section will explore in more detail the question as to how the moral outlines of a public space are drawn and maintained.

## 4. Developing a moral space

“The wife of the founder of Brass'Art and I are behind the counter and we start to chat. Things are slow and calm in the café. I tell her about a recent encounter I had at Brass'Art. One afternoon, a Moroccan woman in her thirties, wearing a scarf with flowers on it, struck up a conversation with me. Our tables were next to each other. I arrived early that day, before my shift. We started talking about the cultural programme and, at one point in the discussion, she suddenly said, ‘I don't come here when there is a concert.’ I was slightly surprised. ‘Why?’ She said that she knows everything about the evening atmosphere (having seen it on FB). She said that the activities are filmed and then posted on the website. ‘And I don't want to be seen here. I don't want my mother, who lives in the area (she points at her house), to see me when it's crowded.’ This anecdote makes my interlocutor smile. She thinks out loud: ‘You know, the mothers who come, for them, it's not a café, it's an association. They are visiting a cultural structure. And I honestly think [she pauses] that at first, these women don't even notice that alcohol is being served. It only strikes them later.’” Observation notes, MK, 8 August 2017

“It's Saturday afternoon. It's hot and the municipal square is packed. People are there for a Thai boxing tournament organised by the municipality of Molenbeek. There is a big ring in the middle of the square surrounded by about 100 people who are mostly young, but there are also a few older men and women. Things are calm and slow in the café, which is empty. A small number of people, customers and non-customers, are sitting outside on the terrace or on benches, watching the match. I take over from the coordinator of the volunteer staff who has to go shopping for kitchen supplies. I'm alone behind the counter. Then, a moment later, a tall, middle-aged Moroccan man arrives and asks me to clear the tables outside where beer bottles and empty glasses are still lying about. I go outside to clean the tables where he and a group of men are sitting. In the meantime, I realise that he is the alderman for sports for the municipality. The group wave at me from a distance to take their order. I explain that they need to order at the bar, and I go back behind the counter. While I am cleaning the counter, a small man who looks like he could be of Moroccan origin enters the café alone and approaches me. He would like something to drink but is undecided about what he wants exactly. He asks for the menu. I hand it to him and, at the same time, someone from the group sitting outside comes to place an order. While I am preparing it (soft drinks and coffees), the man explains that he doesn't know what to drink. I show him the different drinks on offer – hot, cold, alcoholic and non-alcoholic. He looks at the counter and says in a hushed voice, ‘A beer.’ I ask him which one. He asks for a Jupiler, and I explain to him that we only serve craft beers from Belgian breweries. I show him the choice of beers on the menu. He decides that he would like a dark beer, so I suggest one from *Brasserie du Renard*, which suits him. He drinks his beer standing at the counter facing me, his back towards the door leading to the street. I continue to clean and the man suddenly asks me if I am Moroccan. I answer yes. He then starts speaking Darija: ‘You know, it used to be different here. I've been here for 46 years. I came here when I was 10 years old. I come from Tangier. But it was different. It



was much better when I arrived. Things were lively, not like they are now. Like, for example, the match right now – it's a very rare thing. It only happens once in a while.' I ask him what he liked so much in the past. 'What can I say? It was different, that's all [*ash ghan gol lek*]. Things were mixed [*Dunya kanet mkhalta*], it was better [*kanet h̄san*], not like now [*Mashi b̄hal daba*].' The man continues to speak, finishing his beer and ordering another. Another man enters, who is of Moroccan origin and is older – about sixty years old. He comes to the counter and orders a coffee. He suddenly realises that the man next to him is drinking a beer. I feel slightly embarrassed, and the man turns around and moves away from the bar. I also turn around to make a coffee and open a bottle of cold beer (for the older man and the younger man). The feeling of embarrassment grows inside me. I pass the cup of coffee to the man (I put it on the counter). The man moves forward, takes the coffee and thanks me in Darija – thank you my dear [*shukran benti*] – before rushing out of the café." Observation notes, NF, 9 July 2017

- 16 Creating an inclusive space is a balancing act. Contrasting affects and sensitivities are necessary in the creation of a shared space. This type of balancing act involves a feeling of discomfort, with a continuous risk of falling and failure. The status of alcohol as a prohibited drink (*haram*) in the Muslim world,<sup>9</sup> and its diasporic transposition to Brussels, makes it a delicate issue for Brass'Art. Alcohol plays an active role in the careful separation of social spaces according to ethnic and religious affinities. As an agent of division, it allows dividing lines to be drawn between Muslims and non-Muslims, pious and atheists, self and other. The introduction and sale of alcohol in a café such as Brass'Art is for many an act of transgression against Islamic norms, as well as an intrusion. It is not only problematic that a product known to be illicit in Islam is sold, but also that there is a surrendering to the “white vision” – “wanting to please whites”. The confrontation between those for whom a bottle of beer signifies pleasure and conviviality and those who see it as a sign of otherness (i.e. white, or non-Muslim) or illicitness, becomes a structuring element in the organisation of space. The above field journal excerpts illustrate some of these tensions. We also see what happens when the boundaries are blurred and how we negotiate the resulting frictions [Fadil, 2009].
- 17 In the first excerpt, the shared social space is clearly compartmentalised according to time, space and visibility. During the day, the place is seen as respectable. This respectability status is also referred to by its emic coding as an “association”. The presence of alcohol is therefore not a “disruptive” experience, but is – shall we say – domesticated within this shared sociability. On the other hand, on concert evenings, the social excitement transforms the café into a place of blatant consumerism and hedonism based on alcohol. To define the use of space in spatial and temporal terms is to negotiate a relationship with it as a respectable space and to be involved with it on this basis. The second excerpt shows us a completely different situation in which the consumption of alcohol is no longer only for non-Muslims, but is part of a shared moral sociability during the day. The various parties (“for” or “against” alcohol) are involved in tacit cooperation, which more or less allows (alcohol) consumption to take place discreetly so that it does not disturb the moral nature of the social space. These types of negotiation<sup>10</sup> happen on a daily basis at Brass'Art, associated with other concrete safeguards: do not serve alcohol before noon or to people in a state of intoxication, end evening activities at 11 pm, ensure family visuals on social networks (photographs of Moroccan hot drinks – *NosNos*, mint tea – dishes such as *M'semen* (Moroccan pancakes) and traditional soups such *asbissara* and *harira*).

- 18 Moreover, the café is used regularly for all kinds of celebrations and activities firmly rooted in Maghreb or Islamic traditions. During the Ramadan, *iftars* (the first meal at sunset) are improvised there. *Gnawa* performances and workshops are a main part of the cultural programme and the illustration opposite shows the celebration of Mawlid, the prophet's birthday.

“Tonight, *Mawlid* is being celebrated at Brass'Art, with the poster announcing ‘The commemoration of the birth of the Prophet of Islam’. The evening begins with Hamid's conference, followed by a *sama* session and spiritual songs guided by an established member of a Moroccan *Sufi* group in Brussels. The event brings together about forty people, mainly men of Moroccan origin, aged between thirty and fifty. But there are also some women of different ages. The group starts with the songs. It ends with *suras* from the Koran, as well as excerpts from panegyric verses in honour of the Prophet Mohammed. In the improvised concert hall, the audience members swing their arms and repeat the words throughout the performance led by the five singers. There is an interesting juxtaposition between the spiritual event and the photo exhibition honouring the Black Panthers. On the walls there are photos of black men and women, big cars and banners saying, ‘We don't fight skin colour, we fight oppression!’” Observation notes, MK, 1 December 2017

- 19 The celebration of Mawlid is particularly interesting, due to its controversial nature, which has been amplified in recent years. Despite its widespread existence in the Muslim world since the 13<sup>th</sup> century, the celebration of the prophet's birth has always been perceived as a controversial innovation (*bid'ah*). Although this rite has been approved by many scholars over many centuries, it has also been considered illegitimate by others [Tarsitani, 2007; Katz, 2008; Schielke, 2012]. In recent decades, the latter view has been reinforced by Wahhabi and reformist interpretations which have transformed the Mawlid rite into a battleground for defenders of popular forms of Islam. On the occasion of the Mawlid celebration, Brass'Art profiles itself as a promoter or “host” of recently labelled unorthodox customs. The wife of the Brass'Art coordinator says she is aware of the controversial nature of this celebration: “It is not celebrated everywhere, including in some countries. As children we celebrated it. We ate cakes. We had fun. It was a joyful celebration which brought families together.” The large gathering of men and women, the singing of panegyric verses accompanied by ecstatic gestures and the *dhikr*, suggests a communion beyond gender, which is rare in traditional religious spaces (such as mosques). The fact that these celebrations take place in a non-religious setting, outside secluded circles and Sufi orders – the usual place of consecration – indicates the desire to make them public. Such a desire to revive and celebrate the past is also found in the Amazigh New Year celebrations and in the Gnawa trance performances. This type of celebration in an urban diaspora context establishes a renewed framework for social interactions, which also allows the emergence of new types of unit: intra-community (Muslim) unit and/or multicultural (Muslim, non-Muslim) unit. In the case of Mawlid, for example, a shared moral space unfolds (intra-community) where the Muslim ethic prevails. But in other cases, non-Muslims attend the performances. For them, it is an opportunity for cultural contact through which cultural and/or religious otherness is made accessible. The high degree of communion experienced during the Gnawa dance-trance performances represents an extension of Amin's conception of public space – a conception which includes an acceptance and/or accommodation of intuitive and precognitive difference. Through these performances, the everyday “pragmatic reason”, prevailing in the cities of *superdiversity* (phenomenon of “mass and energy which exceed the self”) increases in

power through moments of joy, music and dance. More than mere signs of difference (cultural or religious) or forms of exoticism, these rites form languages and techniques which make notions of unity and difference within an open unlimited ethos real.

## Conclusion

- 20 The Brass'Art community and artistic café opened on 22 March 2017, one year after the Brussels attacks. It was set up as a collective space which seeks to counter the negative image of the municipality and reclaim it, with regard to the gentrification process which is gaining ground. One of the most controversial decisions in establishing this shared space was to serve alcohol there. The friction which the presence of this non-human agent may have generated [Latour and Callon, 1991] has caught our attention above all, as have the negotiation strategies in place in this context. This attention was justified by a dual interest: epistemological interest on the one hand and political interest on the other.
- 21 The first (epistemological) objective of this paper was to make the construction of living together “immanent” – procedural, material. For this reason, the authors examined its emotional determinants, not always conscious, as well as its object-related determinants (i.e. non-human agents including spatiality). It was observed that while the controversial object of alcohol potentially threatens Brass'Art's “open” nature (as a place frequented by populations from Molenbeek with a north African background), the inclusion of other artefacts (such as NosNos coffee, cultural programming and visibility on social media) helps to preserve its “ethical”, “ethnic” and “respectable” character. The second objective was political. In the context of gentrification in Brussels, the presumption of openness is often conditioned in the hegemonic discourse on alcohol consumption – which suggests that “Muslims” are opposed to living together. Gentrification policies do not only consist of neighbourhood infrastructure development. They often also involve the coexistence of different ethical and emotional registers. However, at the micro and local level, the Brass'Art case study reflects the implications of this coexistence in terms of affect and habits (co-presence of agents with different religious sensitivities and orientations). This paper has tried to demonstrate that the fine tuning of the balance of power between the majority and the minority takes place not so much through conscious negotiations or strategies of “civil indifference”, but through pragmatic, practical adjustments, rarely thematised as such. Such a *modus operandi* – which has been described as being “in the making” – justifies the pragmatic approach of our paper, as living together is not achieved in an abstract context, but instead results from the daily confrontation and negotiation of multiple affects.

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## NOTES

1. Frédéric Nicolay, businessman and creator of a well-known bar in Brussels.
2. Bar managed by Nicolay.
3. The notion of "rhizome" is taken from Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari: it refers to a descriptive and epistemological model which contrasts with the model of hierarchical and causalistic organisation whereby the elements are metaphorical branches growing from a base (roots and trunk of the tree). In this model, on the other hand, any element influences any element at any position and at any time, in a reciprocal way.
4. In addition to its function as a meeting point, Brass'Art also hosts a series of artistic activities and exhibitions of more or less well-known personalities. This aspect is fundamental for the initiator, who dreamt of opening a cultural centre to support local talents from ethnic and cultural minorities.
5. The future of the project was far from being guaranteed at the time of the study – it was subject to a deadline set by the administration, first in March 2017, then postponed until after the October 2018 elections. During the call for projects organised by the municipality of Molenbeek, some of the people involved in the cultural café project submitted a new application

(café-restaurant project) to the municipal authorities for the renewal of the lease: it is at the top of the list, which means that it is expected that Brass'art#1080 will reopen in autumn 2019. In the meantime, the formula has taken on a more general meaning, as a Brass'art#1020 opened in March 2019 in Laeken.

6. As an artist, stand-up comedian and public activist involved in the implementation of artistic projects of all kinds on the Brussels scene, the coordinator of Brass'Art is known to be a practising Muslim and to attach a certain importance to his Muslim identity: for example, he reminds us of his critical public stance regarding a Brussels play in which prayer is portrayed as an object of ridicule.

7. Practical judgement is understood here in the Aristotelian sense (*phronesis*), whereby moral judgement is not related to a cognitive or moral framework prior to action but is rather linked to acts.

8. The rigid nature of the relationship to alcohol in cafés and shops is a recent, unprecedented development which signals a return to stricter and more conservative forms of Islam in a considerable proportion of the community, especially among the younger generations. He remembers Moroccans running businesses where alcohol was sold, which nowadays tends to be considered as something “not to do”.

9. In the Moroccan context, alcohol is morally reprehensible and its consumption is severely restricted. While the country has a wine industry and alcohol is very easy to find in many restaurants and cafés which cater to tourists, public consumption is still seen as an immoral act and a form of westernisation.

10. As another example, let us point out the mention of patience (*sabr*) in the interviews, with regard to the management of the affects at play at Brass'Art: based on continuous commitment – temporal and emotional – this ethos cannot be reduced to endurance. Much more, it becomes a means of transforming the social aspect.

## ABSTRACTS

This paper takes the case of the Brass'Art cultural café located on the municipal square of Molenbeek, as a starting point for a study aimed at understanding the construction of a common urban space with a pluralistic purpose. Based on an ethnographic study between May 2017 and January 2018, this article aims to show how the presence of alcohol in this space mobilises and concentrates diverse and even contradictory repertoires – of a discursive, ethical and emotional nature – behind the creation of public space. The Brass'Art case study reflects at the micro and local level the implications of the coexistence of agents with different religious sensitivities and orientations. According to a pragmatic methodology, this paper tries to demonstrate that the fine tuning of the balance of power between the majority and the minority takes place not so much through conscious negotiations or strategies of “civic indifference”, but through practical adjustments in keeping with the principle of community relations.

Dit artikel neemt het geval van het cultuurcafé Brass'Art, gelegen op het gemeenteplein in Molenbeek, als uitgangspunt van een studie om meer inzicht te krijgen in de opbouw van een stedelijke gemeenschappelijke ruimte met een pluralistische bestemming. Op basis van een etnografie tussen mei 2017 en januari 2018 wil dit artikel aantonen hoe de aanwezigheid van alcohol op deze plek verschillende en zelfs tegenstrijdige registers – van discursieve, ethische en

affectieve aard – aanvoert en concentreert, die de samenstelling van de openbare ruimte activeren. De casestudy van Brass'Art is emblematisch omdat die op lokale microschaal de gevolgen weergeeft van een co-existentie tussen actoren met gevoeligheden en diverse religieuze voorkeuren. Volgens een pragmatische methodologie tracht dit artikel aan te tonen dat het subtiele hernieuwde evenwicht van de machtsverhouding tussen meerder- en minderheden niet zozeer het resultaat is van bewuste onderhandelingen of strategieën van “burgerlijke onverschilligheid” maar wel van praktische aanpassingen van het principe van “samen doen”.

Ce papier prend le cas du café culturel Brass'Art, situé sur la place communale de Molenbeek, comme point de départ d'une étude qui vise à comprendre la construction d'un espace commun urbain à vocation pluraliste. Basé sur une ethnographie entre mai 2017 et janvier 2018, cet article veut montrer comment la présence de l'alcool dans ce lieu mobilise et concentre des répertoires divers, voire contradictoires – de types discursif, éthique et affectif – activant la constitution de l'espace public. Le cas d'étude de Brass'Art est emblématique en ce qu'il reflète à l'échelle micro et locale les implications d'une coexistence entre acteurs avec des sensibilités et des orientations religieuses diverses. Suivant une méthodologie pragmatiste, le papier essaie de démontrer que le subtil rééquilibrage du rapport de force entre majoritaires et minoritaires ne se fait pas tant par des négociations conscientes ou des stratégies d'« indifférence civique » que par des ajustements pratiques au principe d'un « faire-ensemble ».

## INDEX

**Trefwoorden** openbaar ruimte, gentrificatie, immigratie, multiculturalisme

**Keywords:** public space, gentrification, immigration, multiculturalism

**Mots-clés:** espace public, gentrification, immigration, multiculturalisme

**Subjects:** 3. démographie – immigration – société multiculturelle

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